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SUBJECT: BALKH PROVINCIAL COUNCIL CHAIRMAN FRUSTRATED WITH SWEDISH
PRT CONTRIBUTIONS

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The Balkh Provincial Council chairman recently voiced his displeasure to Swedish PRT officials about Swedish development efforts and asked them for visible reconstruction projects. He repeated a message first uttered by Balkh Governor Atta that Sweden should pack up and leave PRT Mazar-e Sharif if it is unwilling to contribute to infrastructure development. Sweden's plan to boost the level of its development assistance to Afghanistan by approximately USD 14 million is unlikely to mute the criticism its PRT is receiving from the Balkh government and the general public. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) During an October 5 meeting with the Swedish PRT commanding officer and Swedish development and political advisors, Balkh Provincial Council Chairman Farhad Azimi let loose with a litany of complaints about the Swedish PRT's development efforts. He described the relationship between the provincial council and the PRT as "cold," saying that the only times the PRT commanders visit the provincial council are when they first arrive in Mazar and when they pay their farewell calls. Azimi compared the Swedish PRT unfavorably to other PRTs around the country, citing the lack of infrastructure reconstruction projects in Balkh and discounting the impact of Swedish-funded, small scale training programs. He referred to the letter Governor Atta sent to UNAMA last July in which Atta asked UNAMA to ask ISAF to replace Sweden with another lead country for PRT Mazar. Nor did Azimi spare criticism for the Swedish media, who he claimed never bothered to meet provincial council members or ordinary people during visits to the PRT and thus only heard positive accounts of the PRT's work instead of hearing how Balkh residents view the PRT's contributions.

¶3. (SBU) Sweden plans to increase its development assistance to Afghanistan by 100,000,000 Swedish kronars (approximately USD 14.3 million), for a total of roughly 74 Million USD. Currently Sweden channels about 80 percent of its Afghanistan development assistance through the central government in Kabul while 20 percent (roughly USD 12 million) of the total is directed at the four provinces that the Swedish-led PRT covers (Balkh, Jowzjan, Samangan, and Sar-e-pol). Even with the funding increase, the amount of development assistance each of these 4 provinces will receive is unlikely to satisfy critics within their provincial governments.

¶4. (SBU) COMMENT: Sweden has been battling the image of a "do nothing" PRT and not doing a very good job at it. Azimi is echoing the views of Governor Atta, but those two men are not alone in

expressing frustration with the PRT. The governors of Jowzjan, Samangan, and Sar-e-pol and religious councils and village elders in those provinces have also lobbed similar criticisms at the PRT at different times. Sweden has funded some infrastructure projects, such as road construction in Samangan and a few bridges in Sar-e-pol, but has done nothing of that sort in Balkh where criticism of its efforts is loudest. Sweden's most pressing development focus should be on building and maintaining relationship "bridges" to win over outspoken critics like Azimi and Atta.

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